to know me as hardly golden is to know me all wrong

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by norgbelulah

Summary

The God's honest truth of it was that he didn't want to be whatever Boyd was, he didn't want to be Boyd Crowder's friend, and he didn't want to follow him down into the darkness that was always waiting for them both.

And he knew if he stayed, he would be all of those things and learn not to mind them.

Tim Gutterson goes on an investigation down into a very different Harlan County, one where Raylan never left, one where he and Boyd are compelled to sort out what's between them on their own, with the eyes of their daddies and an entire community watching them.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

- Inspired by I Have Always Lived in the Moment by scioscribe

"No, man, no way," Johnny said into his cigarette, looking hard at the ground, a nervous twitch in his fingers. "No way those two are faggots. Where'd you hear a thing like that?"

"Around," Tim replied lazily.

It was common enough knowledge if you asked the right people in the right way. They'd answer in hushed tones, never meeting Tim's eyes, and not in the way you don't look at a cop, but in the way you don't look at anything when you know the danger's all around you. But these people, they want to talk about it too. They want to tell Tim, in they way you want to tell somebody about the craziest thing you ever saw.

One girl at the brothel he rolled up to yesterday told him with big eyes, giddily coming down from her latest high, "I shouldn't say, but, those boys, they--they're like a fuckin' tornado, ripping up the earth all around, one calm as you please, the other one like--he spins around him, I don't know. It's kind of beautiful, but like, really scary, too. And they--you can just tell they're close, they're *near*, and they know--like, they know what's goin' on in each other's heads and even *if* they ain't fuckin', they fight like lovers. Like they know where to stick the needle, but it don't hurt no more because they stuck it so much already."

When Tim asked her how she knew she said, "Oh, I only seen 'em once," and her eyes went far away for a second. "They don't come 'round here too much. But you can just tell. They're like a tornado, okay?"

When he asked the madam, a blonde woman with a mouth that maybe didn't used to look so hard, she gave him a look, only half-way filled with fear. "I don't know nothin' about it," she said. "And you'd best stop throwing questions like that around. Words spread like wildfire in this county."

"They threaten to hurt you?"

She smirked and raised her chin at him. "Boyd Crowder and Raylan Givens ain't threatened to hurt me me in all my life, Marshal. It's you, should be worried."

Art said when they sent him out here the last Marshal to come this way on the trail of these two quit the service less than a year later. An ATF before that went missing, from three counties over. Evidence pointing to anyone in Harlan was scant, but Art told Tim anyway.

It wasn't like he wanted this case, but he was the closest thing to a back-country boy the office had right now and these folk always liked talking to their own kind.

Tim hated it already. And he was worried.

"You shouldn't call them fuckin' faggots, man," Johnny Crowder told the dirt, then looked up into Tim's eyes. "They fucking hate that."

Tim hadn't called them faggots. He'd just said he heard they were lovers.

Though from everything else he heard, love couldn't be the only thing between them.

“I won’t live my life in definitions,” Boyd says. “Will you?”

And there it is again. His challenge. Raylan has to meet it, can’t not.

He kisses him.

They fuck for the first time while Boyd speaks to him about the infinite scales between right and wrong, the myriad shades of gray in his world. Raylan listens and he feels better when they are finished.

Though they are far from done.

“You can’t leave, Raylan,” Boyd says.

“You gonna stop me?” he snarls.

“Yes, Raylan,” he says and touches him.

The muscles of Raylan’s back coil under the pads of Boyd’s fingers. He can feel it through the fabric of his shirt.

“I’ll tear you apart before I let you walk away from this,” he whispers.

Raylan stops walking.

“Daddy says I know how to get what I want,” Boyd tells him under the sheets. His hands are on Raylan, whose skin is furnace-warm. “He wants me to work for him.”

Raylan touches his face, fingers cool like a breeze. “But you don’t want to.”

Boyd smiles. He gets it right more often now. Another thing Boyd wanted.

“I want to run things, Raylan,” he says. “I want you to help me.”

Raylan doesn’t reply. Boyd knows how to get what he wants.

“Get out while you can, Raylan,” she says to him.

“I’d be gone already if I thought I’d stay that way, Helen,” he replies and turns away.

“Shit,” she says, blinking back tears more of anger than anything, as she watches him climb into Boyd Crowder’s pick up.

Boyd puts his hand around the back of Raylan's neck, at the nape, and Raylan shakes him off like an untrained dog. There's something shining in his eyes even though he doesn't smile.

They're too close for comfort.

They stand too near and they talk too hushed and their eyes follow each other across the room.

Raylan is more movement than Boyd is. Boyd stands and he waits and his eyes track Raylan and his face doesn't change but his eyes get deep and you don't know what he's thinking, ever.
Raylan rotates around him. He paces and he chews on his lip. His hands fly to and from his sides, fingers curling, always grasping at nothing, like he never gets what he wants. Unless, of course, his hands are on Boyd, on his shoulder, his arm, brushing past his thigh or his hip, tugging, poking, eyes searching and restless.

They only smile if they're talking to each other.

It's Bo Crowder who calls them out, in full view and earshot of every man in Johnny's bar. Arlo Givens stands in a darkened corner, arms crossed in front of him, chewing on hate and bitterness. They both know he's there.

There's a gun in Raylan's hand and it's pointing to the ground. Boyd gave it to him last night. There's a knife in Boyd's boot, he'll reach for it if he must.

Bo calls them out for fucking and for skimming off his business. They'll only fess up to one.

Boyd whispers in Raylan's ear and Raylan's eyes clear as though a storm's passed. He smiles. Boyd tells his daddy they'll parley in the back. Raylan raises the gun and everyone goes quietly.

Boyd does all the talking. Raylan is silent and his eyes are on Arlo when they aren't on Bo. He ignores the shotgun aimed at his chest. He doesn't when it's pulled toward Boyd.

"Raylan's gonna shoot if you don't put that thing down, cousin," Boyd says and Raylan smiles, bares his teeth, more like.

They talked about this. Now, Boyd is the mastermind, Boyd has control. If he doesn't have that, they have no victory, no one will follow. Raylan gives him obedience, gives him his silence, because it's not his turn to take.

He's counting the days and he's looking at Arlo again.

In the end, Bo gives Boyd half the business and Boyd and Raylan take it all. Bo gets a cut for a while, until he doesn't anymore and he sells oxy from Florida out the back of the bar and gives his son his own protection fee.

Johnny stays out of it after he mumbles something about fags and Raylan sticks a shotgun in his belly. The shell is a dud when Raylan pulls the trigger and Boyd's there before he can rack another in and pull again, hands tight on his arm.

"You're lucky," Raylan growls, eyes wide and far too fierce. "We don't live by definitions these days, Johnny."

He drops the gun to the ground and pulls Boyd into his arms. Boyd goes, fast and full, hissing through his teeth and Raylan's lips as they kiss in full view. Boyd pulls him into the back a moment later and everyone in the bar hears them fucking.

Everyone tries very hard not to talk about it.

Everyone tries except Arlo.

Arlo won't shut up about it. He gets in people's faces. He asks them how they'd like it if their son swallowed cock all the time, took it up the ass from a boy like Boyd Crowder.

No one answers him. People look away, pretend they don't hear. It makes Arlo mad, madder than Raylan has ever seen him.

"You're just pissed I made off better than you," Raylan tells him. He gets not a little satisfaction from the statement as well. Boyd is behind him, leaning against the truck parked adjacent to Raylan's gravestone. Boyd stares at that instead of the spit frothing at Arlo's lips as he hurls insult after slur after injury at them both. Raylan slides his hands into his pockets.

He won't take this shit from anybody but Arlo. From him, it sounds like "whore" and "tramp" and "cunt" and every piece of verbal abuse Frances Givens ever took in front of her son. This, he can take. If Arlo tries to hit him, he won't be held responsible.

"I tell you why I'm pissed, you little fag," Arlo spits. "I didn't need to be no lap dog to a fuckin' Crowder to get me what I got. I did it all on my own. Never took nothin' from nobody."

Raylan smiles. "Never took no love either," he murmurs then raises his voice. "You wanna see a dog, Arlo?"

"Fuck, no," Arlo yells.

"Too bad," Boyd says, moving off the truck now and stepping forward.

"I'm gonna say this once, and only to you, because you didn't get the goddamn hint, you fuckin' idiot. I ain't nobody's dog, Arlo Givens. What I am, is in a relationship, a fucking partnership with Boyd Crowder." As he speaks, Boyd leans up against him, nosing across his ear and neck, breathing deep and staring straight at Arlo. Raylan raises a hand and draws it up

the side of Boyd's face and through his hair, curling his fingers like he's giving him a good scratch. Boyd's lids fall half closed and he shows Arlo a rictus of a smile.

Raylan continues like nothing strange is happening at all, "And that means--because I know you don't really know what it means--that sometimes I give and sometimes Boyd does. Sometimes I do what he wants, and some other times, Arlo, he does what I need."

Boyd lunges forward then, stooping low to pull his butterfly knife from his boot, flipping it open, and coming up fast to slice it across Arlo's face, from lip to temple. Arlo cries out and stumbles back, but Boyd grabs him and knees him to the ground, holding the knife steady and watching the man's blood flow with a clinical air. "Today, I am giving," Boyd says softly.

Helen comes out of the house then. The screen door banging loud as she rushes toward them. Raylan looks up at her and frowns deeply. Frances is a year dead and Raylan never stops by anymore.

"Jesus Christ, Raylan," she shouts.

He works his jaw at her dressing gown and says, "He might need stitches."

"Well, fuck you too," she says, slowing and eyeing Boyd when she comes near.

"I guess so," Raylan replies then calls, "Boyd," strong and sharp, and Boyd stands up and steps away. Helen takes off the dressing gown and rips a length from the bottom, wadding it up and pressing it to Arlo's face while the man blinks through his own blood and struggles for speech.

Raylan blinks at her once, twice and adds, "Helen, we can't have him goin' around talkin' like he does."

"Everybody *knows*, Raylan," she tells him.

Boyd looks as though he's about to speak, but Raylan glances sideways and he shuts his mouth. They both see Helen note it. "It's the way he does," Raylan says patiently. "We can't have that disrespect."

Her lip curls and Raylan works his jaw again. He raises his chin, proud as you please. "We won't have it," he says. "Make sure he understands."

"Are you sorry, Boyd?" he asks in the night.

"What for?" Their legs tangle and Boyd breathes deep.

"I'm all torn up," he whispers, hands in Boyd's hair. "Would you take it back?"

"No," he says. "Never." And they both know that's why he stays.

“We are more than what they count us as,” Boyd reminds him in the morning, his lips at Raylan’s temple.

“We’re everything we know we are, and everything they think we are,” Raylan replies, eyes closed. He reaches for Boyd’s cock.

In the beginning the choices were easy, or Boyd painted it that way for him, after the first hard decision. Now Raylan doubts and he chafes and they know he can’t do that, if they’re going to keep what they have.

Raylan doesn’t know if he wants it anymore.

Boyd wants it enough for them both.

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“And you’re Crowder’s sister?”

Tim read up some more before he went back down into the holler.

The madam smiled like she knew he he got it wrong on purpose. Two girls, half naked, ran through the living room-sized bar hand in hand, laughing loudly. She tried to look indulgent, but it still came out like a cringe. “Sister-in-law. Former.”

“Your husband met with an unfortunate accident, I hear.” He tapped his pen through that lie. He heard no such thing. He read the man died under some kind of out of control mining machinery, ripping up his legs and guts before someone turned the thing off.

She squinted at him. “You might say that. I wouldn’t.”

“What would you say?”

“Wasn’t so unfortunate for me.” Her mouth was a thin line, but there was humor in her eyes.

“Did your brother-in-law or Raylan Givens have anything to do with your husband’s death?”

“Does the law think that they did? I never heard of no charges brought.”

“They were there, at the mine, that day.” According to the file, though local P.D. hadn’t questioned them for some reason.

“I remember, Deputy.”

“The file also indicates you had a broken arm at the time. Had been to the hospital just the previous night.”

She raised her eyebrows. “And?”

He raised his right back. “Just trying to make sure my facts are straight here, ma’am.”

“That was also an accident, Deputy. And I’m really not sure why you’re askin’ right now about a ten year old mining accident that has absolutely nothing to do with this fugitive you’re lookin’ for. He ain’t here, and he wasn’t here. I know because I would have seen him. You’ll have to ask Boyd and Raylan and anybody else themselves what they know.” She laid out the tone of her final word on that.

He told her thank you, tipped an invisible hat, and went on his way.

He used the same line on Bo Crowder, just out of correctional on drug charges.

Tim heard he could have gotten a lower sentence if he rolled on his son for racketeering. He was quoted in the deposition as saying he preferred to stay alive, even if it was in prison. He laughed when someone said WITSEC.

“Son, there ain’t no *straight* facts in Harlan these days, didn’t you know?” And Tim couldn’t decide if the man was trying to make a joke or not.

He wouldn’t say anything bad about them when Tim prompted. The look on his face was enough to make clear he didn’t approve.

“I’d put ‘em both in the nuthouse,” he muttered after Tim wore him down. “They ain’t human no more.”

Tim didn’t wonder how a father could think that of his son.

He showed Bo the picture of the bail-jumper, small-time dealer, backwoods boy, but not from Harlan. The credit card of a former girlfriend pinged near Corbin. If he was trying to go off the map, he might do it in Harlan.

Tim hoped that he didn’t, but Bo’s eyes got shifty when he said he didn’t know him.

He introduced himself, badge held high, to Helen Givens at the bottom of the steps to her porch. She had a shotgun at her hip, barrel to the ground. She put it away, nodding for him to come up.

A man Tim presumed to be Arlo, sat by, smoking a cigarette and not looking at anything much. There was a long scar across his face, a once deep cut, healed poorly and aged raw.

“This is Raylan Givens’ last listed address,” he told them. They’ve probably heard it before.

“He ain’t here,” Helen huffed.

Tim knew that. “I was hopin’, you could tell me a little bit about him. You see, I’ve heard a lot of things. I’m just trying to sift through the bullshit.”

Helen frowned at him. “What are you after him for?”

“My office is concerned he or his associate is employing a federal fugitive,” Tim said. He didn’t say, he was really fucking curious, too. He thought maybe he saw realization dawn anyway.

“They wouldn’t do that,” Helen told him. “Brings down too much attention. If he’s here, your fugitive, he’s a hanger on to one of the businesses. You don’t need to talk to Raylan.”

“Where can I find him?”

She huffed again and balled her hands into fists. “You should get out son, before he finds you.”

Tim read about the last Marshal on assignment to these two. He cited family circumstances, his wife was going to leave him. Art told Tim quietly the man had moved his family away from Lexington months before he put in his resignation, only days after he reported speaking with Boyd Crowder and Raylan Givens.

Tim was on this case too because he didn’t have a family.

“He was a good boy,” Helen said suddenly, lips thinned and brows turned down. Arlo laughed, a bitter bark of irony. “You want to blame Boyd,” Helen turned to him accusingly. “You don’t ever think about what you did to him.”

“Don’t need to. He still could’ve left.” Arlo’s voice was weak, like he didn’t speak much.

“Not when he was gonna leave someone who loved him like that.”

“Ain’t nobody should love like that. That ain’t what it is.”

“Like you fuckin’ know.” She was near tears. “Like you were gonna teach him.”

Tim replayed that conversation in his head far too much on his drive back north.

He’d left without showing them the photo.

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Boyd says they met in the womb, in the days before Mary Crowder knew she was pregnant.

Raylan knows they were close, his mama and Boyd’s, close enough to be sisters, closer. Everyone says so.

They can say that now because Boyd’s mama died. They didn’t say it before because their daddies wouldn’t let it happen.

Frances married because she was pregnant. That’s what Helen tells Raylan. Mary Crowder married because Frances did. She got a baby almost as fast and a better deal out of Bo, because he loved her, and she loved her boys.

She was always sorry for that, or so Helen says, until that drunk driver got her on the State Road and she bled out of her car on a dusky evening with no help for miles.

Boyd pressed his hands to her chest where the other car had ripped her open. He was on the floor, looking for a toy and banged his head hard enough to hurt for days. Bowman was

crying in the back seat and the other driver was dead. Boyd tried to hold her blood in with his small hands and she passed trying to soothe his broken sobs.

Boyd says all this to Raylan days later on the front porch of his house. He tells the story in small words with no tears. His father told him not to cry.

The funeral is over and they are sweating out the end of summer in white shirts and clip-on ties. They are seven years old and have always been friends.

They hear shouting from inside the house and Raylan's mother runs out, her face tear-stained and terrified. She trips on black heels and pulls Raylan to her by the hand. "Come on, baby," she says then stops, for just a moment, and looks at Boyd.

"I loved her," she says and neither boy understands. Then she tells Boyd, "I'm so sorry, honey."

Arlo comes out moments later, spits on the threshold, a pushes them to the truck. He drives home lips spilling curses the whole way. Raylan is told never to speak to Boyd Crowder again. Frances is slapped when she makes a small noise of protest.

Raylan forgets for a long time that Boyd Crowder is his friend, but he never really makes any others.

Years later, Boyd watches Raylan when they are in school.

He doesn't mean to, it's just that he seems so familiar. He likes to see Raylan smile. He remembers a laugh like that from somewhere.

He remembers it like he can almost remember his mother. Except for her blood. He always remembers that.

His grandmother goes senile and she asks him where that Givens boy got to. He frowns at her and she says, "He always hangin' 'round here with you, baby. Where he get to?"

He asks his daddy if he and Arlo were friends as boys.

"Fuck, no," Bo says and tells him to finish counting the money.

He sees Mrs. Givens at church when Bo remembers to make them go and she says to him one day, "You look so much like your mama, Boyd. I'm so glad." He wants to embrace her and holds himself very still instead. Behind her, Raylan's eyes skip over him like he's nothing and head for the door. He just wants to get the hell out.

Boyd can't blame him. But he can't stop himself from wanting to change that, either.

Raylan meets Boyd Crowder again because his cousin Johnny is an asshole.

Johnny Crowder is an All American pitcher. Johnny Crowder went to Pennsylvania for some championship game. Johnny Crowder is joining the Army at eighteen to better serve his country.

Johnny Crowder thinks he's hot shit and he won't go places unless he has an entourage.

It's obvious Boyd doesn't want to be there. Raylan doesn't either.

It's a two keg party on Hunter Mosley's back forty and nearly everyone else there is drunk. Boyd watches Raylan and Raylan notices. He frowns until Boyd sidles up to him and says, "You wanna get out of here?"

"Sure, but I think half the team's gonna be pissed at me come Monday," Raylan replies, baffled as to why Crowder is talking to him.

"You really care what they think?"

Raylan doesn't say that he does. Boyd can tell anyway. "Makes my life more difficult," he says, shrugging.

In response, Boyd very carefully stoops to set his drink down on a rock next to them and proceeds to tackle Raylan to the ground, shouting something about his mother. Raylan's paralyzed for a second, but still manages to catch Boyd's clenched fist before it comes down on him.

Boyd leans in close, straddling him, breathing hard, almost gleefully in his ear and says, very low, "Punch me in the face, Raylan."

Raylan gets to leave the party after he does and Boyd looks up and grins at him through bloody teeth.

They don't speak again until they're down in the mine.

Raylan isn't afraid right away. If he's being honest with himself, and later with Boyd, before he gets down there, he never really thinks about what it's like in the black.

He hates it. Hates it more than the podunk town, than the hillbilly people, than the few daylight hours. He hates the coal dust and the heat and the noise. It makes him feel small and breakable in a way nothing else ever has.

Boyd watches him, watches out for him, sees his fear grow.

In the low light of the puddle, with the girls laughing behind them and the strike of a pool cue in front, Raylan's hands are shaking. Boyd tells him, "I'll look out for you, Raylan," and his eyes are grave.

Raylan's had just enough to believe him. It only take another shot to get him to smile.

Boyd loves it.

Raylan starts to miss Boyd's eyes when they aren't on him.

When he's alone in his room, after shift, after drinks, when they aren't yet close enough to admit they want to stick together, he wants that security, he wants to be held.

He shakes his head. He stops thinking about it. He tells himself he does.

Boyd worries about Raylan constantly.

He knows what goes on in the house, sees the bruises Raylan only tries to hide when they're worse than usual. He banks a rage he's never felt before when he thinks of Arlo Givens' fucking face. He clenches his fists and doesn't go over there.

They stay out drinking too late. They sneer at everyone who isn't themselves and keep apart and whole and only let anyone else scrape away at their outsides.

At lunch, in the forever waning sunlight of the hollers, Boyd reads to Raylan from his favorite books, Maugham and Waugh, Faulkner and Hemingway. Raylan listens like he never listened in school and follows the curve of Boyd's mouth as he speaks each word with a low intensity that seems to be for Raylan's ears alone.

He shows Raylan his soul in the words of other men and Raylan can't look away.

He leans his head against the bench where Boyd sits and waits for Boyd to look down at him, smile, and say, "Isn't that the best thing you've heard all day, Raylan?"

He tells Boyd it is and he thinks about Boyd's smile when they go down in the black. Sometimes, when they're down there, even if they're near, Raylan can't see it. So, it's the sunlit one that sustains him when he can't catch Boyd's eye. Though it never lasts the day through.

Which is why Raylan almost doesn't go down when the shift manager separates them.

Boyd's hands are on his arms, planting him, even as his feet try to march towards the office trailer. "Don't mind it," Boyd says, low again, eyes clear. "Don't fret." Raylan looks at him and frowns.

"I don't know, Boyd, I--" He's never said anything about it. How important it is. He's not sure if Boyd knows.

"Just today, Raylan," Boyd tells him. "Don't mind it after. Just get through today."

He does understand, then, and he must always have and suddenly Raylan almost hates him for it. For knowing, the way he always does, when it always takes Raylan so much longer to catch on.

Raylan shoves him away, spits at the feet of the manager, and stalks to the cart where he watches Boyd stare at him, so calmly, as he's taken down into the earth, alone.

Raylan's hands shake again at the end of shift like they haven't for months now, and it scares him. He doesn't want to depend on Boyd. He doesn't want any part of what's happening, he doesn't think, doesn't know. He drinks alone at Audrey's, Boyd wasn't waiting for him when he came back up.

The next morning there are splints and white bandages on three of the shift manager's fingers and Raylan and Boyd are on the same crew again.

"See?" Boyd says softly. "I told you. Just one."

You mean three? Raylan wants to ask, but he clams up and looks hard at Boyd, almost a plea, but Boyd just looks steadily back at him like Raylan has a choice to make.

He thinks about those fingers all day long. He thinks about Boyd's face, Boyd's smile, Boyd's eyes, and he thinks about how the manager looks at Boyd now, how he looks at Raylan and between them.

He thinks it's wrong, it's terrifying, it might be the worst thing anyone's ever done for him. It might be the best too, and Raylan bites his lip to stop a smile. He sheds a tear, and settles his shoulders, and tries to calm the pounding of his heart.

It seems so much louder today than the machines ever were.

At lunch, Raylan cleans up quick and pulls Boyd off the yard by his collar. He leaves their lunch pails in the locker room. There's storage at the far end of the parking lot and he pushes Boyd rough up against the gray aluminum wall. Boyd waits patiently for Raylan to speak.

His hands are up in Boyd's coveralls when he does. "What-what did you do, Boyd?"

Boyd tilts his head. "What do you think, Raylan?"

The questions are moronic. They both know.

Raylan feels over-warm and light-headed. Boyd has raised his hands to press against Raylan's waist. Boyd's skin is coal-dark and he smells of sweat and the orange-grit hand soap.

Raylan can't pull away. "Don't. Don't do that for me, I--"

Boyd blinks, like he's said something incomprehensible. He extends his neck, leaning forward, his eyes steady on Raylan's. "Why not?" He breathes in steady. He draws a hand up.

Raylan takes a breath and shakes his head.

"Let me, Raylan." There's a plea, too, somewhere in Boyd's voice.

“There’s blood on your hands, Boyd,” Raylan tells him desperately and they’re so close now. They’re breathing the same air. “For me.”

Boyd’s hand is curled around the back of Raylan’s neck and his eyes are such a deep brown and so dark. Raylan’s mouth has fallen open and Boyd is looking at it intensely.

“There has always been blood on my hands, Raylan,” he says.

The bell calls them back down before they are finished.

Raylan can feel Boyd’s proximity while they work and his mind is not on his task. Boyd nudges him back into line, once, twice, he loses count. Raylan shakes his head and blinks dust from his eyes, tries to loosen the boy from his thoughts. Boyd is too near to let him.

He almost wants the earth to swallow him when the ceiling begins to shake.

He thinks it might be easier than deciding what to do.

Boyd pulls him up the shaft, shouting at him desperately to run, clawing at Raylan’s arms and shoulders until he moves fast enough to get out. The dust, heavier than smoke, billows around them as they come up and Raylan has scraped his knuckles against the rough hewn passage to the light.

They call a head count and Raylan’s answer is far shakier than Boyd’s, Boyd’s eyes much too grave. Boyd hasn’t removed his hand from Raylan’s elbow and they are both breathing hard.

Boyd takes him over to the lockers, pulling far more gently this time. Raylan goes, needing to be led and hating it all the way. He opens his mouth to say something, but he can’t find the words he wants, doesn’t know what they are to even begin searching. He doesn’t have the strength to pull away and feels the desire slipping through his bloodied fingers.

The other men have taken the few showers there are in the wash room and have closed a ring around the large basin. Boyd takes a bottle from one of the drunks on the crew and sits Raylan down on their bench.

He pours the whiskey over Raylan’s hands and he’s holding himself very still. Raylan frowns because he’s never noticed that before. He wonders if it’s something Boyd does a lot, if he’s always holding himself back. He never meant for Boyd to do that.

Boyd’s eyes hold no expectation, but his hands aren’t as steady as they could be. Raylan takes them in his own, now sticky from the alcohol, and he squeezes them still.

Raylan has never stood on solid ground.

He thinks, if he has Boyd, maybe he doesn’t need to.

Raylan always wanted to leave Harlan.

It should be easy after the collapse. It should have scared him away.

But Raylan is lying next to Boyd in warm blankets with soft smiles. He feels better than he ever has before and he knows it's because of Boyd.

He feels heavy and peaceful and he's thinking hard about something Boyd said, while they were fucking.

"We can be everything," Boyd says over again in Raylan's head. "We can be who we are and what they think we are, too, and we can take them all by surprise. They won't see us coming, Raylan."

Raylan's eyes are drawn to Boyd's hands on his skin, so natural there he can barely stand it.

He shifts and pulls Boyd to him, closer and closer.

Boyd says, "I love you," like he needs to hear it and Raylan tells him to shut up because he really, really doesn't. He knows, oh he knows.

It's only something you can try to walk away from.

"Raylan, you don't have to do this," Boyd says, with a man's face underneath his boot.

When he says that--when something fierce and prideful sparks in Raylan's chest and that little twist of guilt burns up with it, when Raylan eases the death-grip on the gun in his hand--he finally, finally wants to.

He bends down low, slides the barrel under the man's chin and says, "That's okay, Boyd. It won't take long."

He learns to like the sound of Boyd talking through somebody else's pain.

After a while, they don't even need to hurt anyone anymore. They see the fear they strike in people's eyes and they smile at it and no one steps out of line.

They don't need to hurt anyone, but sometimes they do anyway.

Sometimes they hurt each other.

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The only photographs anyone in law enforcement had of the Harlan Boys, as Tim and Rachel began to call them, are a mugshot each, taken on the same day.

They both had the same expression on their faces, calm, collected, perfectly neutral.

It kind of freaked Tim out. He only looked them over once.

Art was getting impatient. The trail was running cold and it began to look more and more likely their bail-jumper was hiding in the shadow of these two men, somehow larger than life and completely undetectable.

He threatened to go down with Tim, who immediately said no. He believed the stories, or halfway did. Art had a family. Art wasn't as fast as he used to be.

"Find them, Tim," Art said. "Or we'll get a team down there and comb through houses looking for this guy."

Tim started to wonder if the man wasn't dead for trespassing on their territory or something crazy like that. He found it hard to believe that they killed indiscriminately or really quite that often, if at all.

There was a reason no one had got them yet. They were smart, careful, like their mugshots.

He drove back down to Harlan.

On the way, he ran into a State Trooper, Tom Bergen, who he'd encountered a few times before.

Bergen looked at Tim with sun-squinted eyes and said, "Those two have done more here to set back the progress of gay rights than any religious organization I can think of. People in Harlan, they think that kind of thing makes you crazy, and maybe it did with them. I only hear the stories."

"You never met them?" Tim asked.

He shrugged. "I arrested one of their boys once. A petty thief almost straight off the panhandle. He told me just to lock him right up. Said he didn't want Raylan to break his nose again."

"He say why Givens roughed him up?"

"Apparently, he was always forgetting to put his damn car in park. Said Givens told him he could abide a trigger-happy moron and he could abide a blabber-mouth moron, in small doses, but not both at once, and definitely not one who couldn't remember the basic mechanics of operating a vehicle. I wouldn't be surprised either, if they had to do quite a bit of damage control on account of that boy."

"Jesus," Tim said. "I'd probably try and knock some sense into him, too."

"Yeah, he really was a few apples short if you know what I mean."

"He tell you anything else about Givens and Crowder?"

"Just that they're screwin' each other, but don't call 'em fags."

“Yeah,” Tim returned. ”I heard that one from somebody else.”

“Man, it’s weird.” Tom grimaced. “I mean, I got nothing against it. But, this is like--somehow these two have made themselves the stuff of legend ‘round here. They don’t just scare people, they disturb them somehow, they freak ‘em out. They’ve been in charge down there since I came into this place, goin’ on fifteen years now. As far as I can tell, they don’t sell and if they ever murdered anybody, they did a damn good job of hiding it. They’re just in the racket, they make a decent living and they never stray from their borders. You’d think of ‘em as small time, but they have this...reputation. I just--would really like to get a glimpse inside their heads, or just one of ‘em. Shit, I don’t know.”

“I get you, Tom,” Tim told him. “I keep forgetting, I’m not here to flush ‘em out. I’m here for my bail-jumper.”

“That’s dangerous, kid,” Tom said.

“So everyone tells me,” Tim replied dryly. “Don’t make it not the case. Could never keep my nose out of a good mystery.”

“Read too much Miss Marple as a teen, son?”

“Something like that,” he laughed.

Tim drove to Johnny Crowder’s bar again and he look the man gave him when he walked in the door would have warned crows off a corpse.

He ordered a beer anyway and sat himself down. He told Johnny, looking him hard in the eye, “If you can, tell them I want to talk.” Johnny’s lips thinned and he went to the phone.

Tim sat for a while, and waited. To pass the time, he asked anybody who would answer, what they could tell him about these Harlan Boys.

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They have no base of operations. They are where you find them, they go where they need to.

They live in a trailer that they move around the county. You go to the bar if you want to talk to them and if they’re not there, they hear that you were. They come find you.

Raylan carries a glock in a holster. He has a license for it and to carry. He tells that to any lawman who asks like he’s pissed they would think it might not be above the board. Boyd smiles at him like he’s being cute.

No one else ever smiles at Raylan like that.

Boyd tucks a compact Sig into the back of his jeans, when he feels he has need. He does it in such a way, you can’t tell when he’s carrying or not. He has never had a license for any of the weapons he has ever laid his hands on.

Boyd goes to jail. Raylan does not.

Raylan is arrested once, though never convicted, and Boyd beats a man bloody in a bar an hour later. The jail is too small to separate them. They watch their guard like wolves in the night, side by side on the bench, knees knocking, leaning forward, arms nearly crossed over each other. Their eyes almost glowing, the man says later--Raylan's in barely banked rage, Boyd's distant, but watchful.

When they take Boyd to prison for assault, Raylan takes a baseball bat to the jukebox in Johnny's bar. It's playing Emmylou's version of "Pancho and Lefty" and Raylan stops it doing that. It takes him three swings to bust it silent, but he keeps going for another thirty or more. He's sweaty and gasping, but he never says a word and no one calls the law.

Boyd sits in his jail cell and keeps his hands very still. His hands are the only part of him he sometimes can't control when he wants to be touching Raylan. Because Raylan isn't there and he wants him and when he can't have him his hands want to twitch. He doesn't let them. He has a roommate who's heard about Raylan.

The roommate gets a vicious knee to the balls the first night and by the second, a friend has passed Boyd a shiv. He holds it up in the spare moonlight, then secures it in his shoe, and no one tries to touch him again.

When Boyd gets out, after the charges are dropped a month later, Johnny gets a new jukebox and Raylan fucks him hard enough to hurt. He says, "Don't go inside again."

Boyd doesn't reply because they said a long time ago they wouldn't make promises. Raylan breaks someone's jaw the next day.

Boyd knows, when Raylan wants to piss him off, he sleeps with a woman.

Never one of the whores, but someone willing, someone pretty, blonde, and smart enough to understand she's being used.

The first time, Raylan's having a hard time, chafing at the bars they built around each other.

They're in the business and they have to hurt somebody who won't pay. Raylan hates it, or the thought of it, until he looks at Boyd long enough he likes it, because he loves Boyd enough to get it done for him. And after, for a while, he can't look at Boyd and he almost hates him, so he goes and fucks a girl.

Boyd understands and Raylan hates that too. He keeps the girl at his hip for a few days and she's the kind, eats up all that attention. She smiles at their looks, stares, she talks to everybody about it, she touches Raylan, his hands and cheek, his shoulders, the inside of his thigh, until he hates her just as much as he hates everything else.

When he can't stand her anymore, Boyd joins him in the bar and she pouts and tries to touch him until Raylan shoves her away. Boyd meets her eyes for half a second and she recoils

from his look more than she does from Raylan's rejection.

"Stay gone," Boyd says and sits down beside him.

She flees the bar as Raylan turns to him. Elbows on the bartop, Raylan leans into Boyd, brushing his forehead and nose across his cheekbone, to the sweet spot beneath his ear. He stills there and breathes while Boyd eyes everyone else until they look away.

"I ain't sorry," Raylan tells him.

"I don't care," Boyd replies.

Raylan laughs, but it's hard and broken. Boyd kisses his cheek. "You done now?"

"Fuck you."

Boyd smiles and they go home and do it for hours.

They have five boys working for them who collect the money.

They find the less they are seen at the businesses and the homes, when they do come around, the money just appears, as if no one was ever short at all and won't be again any time soon.

When Raylan strays with the girl the first time, one of the boys, a man by the name of Horace Lee, gets it into his head that he and Boyd are on the outs, that if they're distracted enough by a tiff, they'll let anybody walk away with their money.

It's not a bad play, all in all. He takes the money from his stops, faster than usual, and tries to disappear quick with what he's got. He's unlucky because someone mentions it to Devil, who mentions it to Boyd because no one wants to talk to Raylan that week.

He doesn't get away fast enough, and when they catch him, they break his teeth, pissed about being interrupted in their reconciliation. They split their money and hand over half to one of the younger boys, an earnest, loyal kid neither thinks is cut out for a long term career.

They tell him to take Lee, somewhere, anywhere, and get it done fast and smart. They tell him to take the money and set up far away, never come back and never breathe a word. They tell him, if he talks, no one will be able to protect him. His eyes are wide and full of that money and he believes them. He takes it all and goes and no one hears about Horace Lee again.

Boyd is the one who does the recruiting. This time, he gets two old timers just come from inside.

Six months later, when one of them starts to look a little shifty, he tells Raylan to go fuck another girl.

He was feeling restless anyway.

Ava marries Bowman because he promises he won't be anything like his father or brother.

He turns out to be worse than either of them.

She loved Raylan as a girl and she watches him with Boyd when they come over, which isn't often.

She thinks they are beautiful, but in the way something deadly is, just edging towards out of control. It's mesmerizing, really. Every glance, every touch charged. It makes people uncomfortable, especially Bowman.

He hits her more after they leave. He asks her which one she wants so bad she can't stop staring. She asks him if it's Boyd he's hungry for since he can't either. He hits her harder then and they fuck angry because she can't say no and she doesn't know what else to do.

She's glad when they don't come back for months at a time. She works in Corbin and he works in the mine and they try and stay away from those boys.

She can never decide if it's more bad luck than good that Raylan's the one who sees her first in the cast. Bowman had thrown her through the halfway-open closet door, it was an accident her arm hit the doorframe.

Raylan takes one look at her and his eyes sort of go black. He makes a fast grab for her uninjured arm and pulls her down the street with him. She tries to shake him off, but he doesn't let her. "Which shift is he on today?" he asks, after ignoring her frantic calling of his name.

"Raylan, don't--"

"Which one?" He thrusts her into his truck and scowls when she doesn't tell him. "I'm gonna find out, Ava," he says as they pull out from the curb.

"Good for you," she returns, rubbing at her arm with stiff fingers.

She was always very careful about using cover up. She was lucky Bowman was circumspect about where he left his marks. She knows Raylan is more than half pissed as he is because he didn't know until that day.

He drives her to wherever they've parked the trailer and pushes her at Boyd when he comes out, like he can't stand to look at her another second. Boyd looks her over, hands on either side of her arms, then rising up to cup her face. She thinks the fear sweat must have smudged away her makeup. "Oh, Ava," he breathes and his eyes follow Raylan as he paces in front of the truck.

Raylan's hands are clenched tight and Ava rubs at her arm again.

Boyd looks down at the red mark. "Raylan, you need to calm down," he says.

“Fuck you, Boyd,” he snaps back. “She won’t tell me which shift he’s on.”

“So you’re gonna put a bruise on her too?” Boyd’s voice is very soft.

Raylan freezes and stares at Boyd’s fingers on her arm and he gives a violent shudder. He quakes with it and opens his mouth, but turns away without speaking.

“Raylan,” Boyd says and his frown is so deep and his eyes so uncertain, Ava becomes frightened all over again. “I know--”

“You don’t know shit,” Raylan spits back. “This is the only thing, Boyd, that you don’t fucking know.”

Boyd slides his hand off Ava’s arm and says, without taking his eyes off Raylan, he asks, “Which shift, Ava?”

She tells them.

She believes them when they say what happens was an accident, like she believed Bowman about her arm. It’s easier to tell people that way and it’s probably at least halfway true for one or the other of them.

When she can’t pay her bills because he’s dead, they offer to do it for her and she says she won’t take charity. Boyd sets her up with the girls and Raylan doesn’t speak to her for a few months.

Boyd says Raylan doesn’t speak civilly to anybody but him most of the time anyway.

Dickie Bennett wants to take over their protection business because his eyes are too big for his talents to stomach and his mother used to tell him he was smart.

It’s the work of an evening to put him back in his place, his confederates caught and subdued, his mother and Helen in tow to broker a peace Raylan and Boyd had never known was already in place. But stubborn Dickie, comes around again, strictly for revenge on Raylan, who was the one who took out his knee when they were teenagers, who is the one he blames for all his failures.

He tries to get the drop on them in bed, but they hear him creak through the old trailer and Boyd presses Raylan’s glock to the back of his head as he enters the room.

He pleads with them, calling for mercy, claiming he didn’t mean nothing, wasn’t going to do nothing, really, and Raylan watches Boyd’s disgust grow and compound with each word the man speaks.

He can’t find his own words to stop Boyd from pulling the trigger and later wonders if he didn’t just want the man to shut the fuck up too. Dickie Bennett’s woefully inadequate brains splatter all over the room and their bed, covering Raylan in his blood.

It is decided that Dickie broke faith with his family, ignoring Mags' specific orders by coming after Raylan that night, and it is reported to the police that he killed himself. Someone is bribed not to take a close look at the body.

Raylan stares for too long at Dickie's dead eyes. He flinches and turns away when Boyd tries to touch him.

Three days later, Boyd finds Raylan in bed with Ava.

He is sleeping, but she is not, when Boyd quietly enters her trailer. It's well after midnight and the only light to see by is the moon through Ava's small window. Her eyes widen in fear when he looks at her impassively, though she doesn't stir, and she doesn't exactly look surprised to see him.

Raylan is half-clothed, curled up against her side, head pillowed on her stomach and cradled in her arms. Boyd watches him and says nothing for several moments until Raylan stirs.

He blinks his eyes open and they are very dark, even in the moonlight. He smiles at Boyd a little too wide and pulls away from Ava in a very fluid motion, sliding down her bed and pulling himself up by the brass bed frame that's now between them.

"Oh, Raylan," Boyd says softly. The boy's pupils are blown wide open.

He looks at Ava and she says, "I found him in the bar. One of the girls on his lap. Took him here. Don't ask me where he was before that or who gave it to him."

Raylan smiles when Boyd turns his eyes back to him and traces a soft line with his fingertips across Raylan's cheek to cup his face. "Tell me," Boyd says.

"My head was hurting, Boyd," he replies, hands slipping down towards Boyd's waist, trying to pull him closer. "She said it would help." His lips stretch across Boyd's cheek and he huffs softly against his skin. "It don't hurt no more."

"Raylan, look at me," Boyd says, curling his fingers hard in Raylan's hair and pulling him back with force, staring into his dark eyes. "This. Doesn't. Help."

Raylan's eyes widen. His mouth falls open, slack. "Boyd--"

"Do you understand me, Raylan?" he asks, voice just short of breaking. "Not this. Not one more time."

He lets go and Raylan presses close again, fumbling to grasp at him, catching on the brass bars. "Okay, okay, okay," he murmurs. "Don't be mad, Boyd."

He begins to pull at Boyd's belt buckle and fly. He smiles again into his neck and collarbone. Boyd doesn't move to help or hinder him. "I ain't mad," he says softly. "I want you to listen to me."

“I will. I will,” Raylan pants. “I’ll make it good for you, Boyd. I’m sorry.”

Boyd finally steps around to the side of the bed so that Raylan can get a better hold on him. He lets Raylan pull off his clothes and lets his eyes fall to Ava, who freezes under his scrutiny. She’d been gathering herself to escape.

He smiles at her, smooth and cool, and says, right before Raylan swallows him down, “I seen you staring, honey. Stay, if you like.”

She doesn’t.

“I’ll put a bullet in you, Raylan, before I watch you walk down this road,” Boyd tells him in the morning. Raylan’s feet are on the floor. He’s about to slip away and out the door.

He doesn’t look nearly so apologetic as he did last night. He turns over his shoulder to look calmly back at Boyd. He says, with a distinct air of defeat, “There’s a slow bullet coming at us, anyway.”

Boyd stares at him. “No, Raylan,” he says slowly. “There’s not.”

Raylan spins around, pulling his knees up underneath him swiftly and bracing his hands across Ava’s sheets. “It’s coming at us,” he tells Boyd. “How long do you think we can last? You think we’ll make it past forty, the rate we’re goin’?” His tone makes it clear that he doesn’t.

“Raylan.” Boyd pulls his hands up to clutch at Raylan’s face. “*Don’t*, Raylan. This way lies madness.”

Raylan smiles, bitter, almost scornful. “What did you expect?” he asks.

Boyd’s breath catches in his throat. Rendered speechless, he only digs his fingers into Raylan’s flesh, pulling at his hair enough to hurt.

Raylan raises his hands to Boyd’s, loose and gentle. His smile turns soft and understanding. “I won’t do it again,” he says quietly and kisses Boyd on the forehead.

“I couldn’t be without you, Raylan,” Boyd says after dinner. “I don’t want to be without you.”

Raylan reaches across the table. He smiles. “I know. I always figured that.”

After they fuck, Raylan whispers, “I’m not going to do it again.”

Boyd says, “What are we going to do?”

Raylan doesn’t have an answer.

“You could leave,” Boyd says, late in the night, in the dark.

Raylan startles awake. “What are you talking about?”

“It’s madness, Raylan. Just leave it.”

Raylan grabs his hand. He looks at him long in the shallow shadows of a new moon. “‘Member what I said to Helen, that day? I’d’ve been long gone years and years now if I ever thought I’d stay that way.”

Boyd leans in, makes a noise like a keening, low and soft and far too short.

“Could be without you, Boyd, but I don’t fuckin’ want to.”

They are still too close for comfort.

They walk together and talk together with the same smile and the same words, same pattern too, like a preacher who’s been hitting the bottle. They look like they know what you’re thinking before you do yourself.

They look like they know each other’s minds too, but that’s because they do.

They talk in low tones in the night, and not just about the tongue and the flesh. They talk about the day and the men and the hills and the woman and the things they want and the things they know they’ll never get.

When Frankfort tries to move in and one of the boys catches a bullet, Boyd almost leaves Raylan in the bar after, staring into a half-full glass. But an arm shoots out before he turns and Raylan grinds through his teeth, “Boyd,” and Boyd stays for as long as Raylan wants.

They go home together and they fuck slow and sweet and Raylan says, “Don’t you ever turn your back on me.”

Boyd replies, “Tell me what you want, Raylan,” like he hasn’t already.

The law gets Bo for trafficking, selling, and Boyd’s hands shake when he gives Raylan the news. The DEA's got him in custody, they're putting on the pressure.

"He's not going to roll," Raylan says. He's checking the mag in his gun.

"He might," Boyd replies, rubbing a hand across his eyes. "He wants the business back."

"He won't get it if he rolls. No one will trust a rat, 'specially not a dead one."

Boyd looks up swiftly, right into Raylan's eyes.

"I got no compunction about killin' your daddy, Boyd, and he knows it. If anyone's gonna take this from us, it won't be him."

Boyd tilts his head. "Why not?"

Raylan tightens his jaw. "We're better at it than he ever was. More money, less dead. I won't give it back to him."

Boyd tries not to smile.

They are frightening when they need to be.

They work together on it, plan ahead. They know what people think and what people whisper and they use it. They're not afraid of it, of themselves, not like they used to be.

When Ava asks them to straighten out some boy taking the girls too rough, Raylan chafes at an imaginary collar. He gets too close to the boy, he shakes off Boyd's hand. He smiles too slow and too wide and he says, "You like to hit women?"

The boy shakes his head.

There is a hush in the room, an electric tension. They are waiting for them.

"He heard you do," Boyd says from behind Raylan.

"I d-don't," he stammers and Raylan closes his eyes slowly.

"It's a good thing," Boyd tells him.

Raylan makes a face like he doesn't agree. Ava says that boy is real nice to all the girls now.

Boyd's hand is on Raylan's hip, warm and real, leaning over him. Raylan sighs, meeting his eyes, fingers spanning fingers. "What are we?" he murmurs carelessly.

Boyd smiles. "Only what we want to be, Raylan. They can think what they like and what we tell them, but that's not what we are."

It's a softer tune, but a more certain one. Raylan kisses him, leaning up until Boyd dips to meet him. "What do you want to be?" he asks.

"With you."

Boyd has a library card listed under an alias three towns over.

He goes twice a month and takes out twenty books at a time. He carries a bag he uses only for that and all the librarians know him. He asks them about their children.

He reads the books to Raylan whenever he'll sit for it. They are usually in bed.

Raylan bribes the owner of a range in Corbin for the use of his establishment without proper identification or documentation.

It's not that he thinks he needs the practice, just that somehow he finds it soothing.

He works on his draw first, because he's always impressed by men who can draw. Then he works on precision, fast and slow. He shoots maybe a million bullets because pulling a trigger's the easiest thing in the world.

It's everything around that one quick motion that makes things complicated.

They grow older.

They mellow--as much as they can.

After Raylan returns from the range, he lets more things roll off his back. He smiles more. He lets more people than Boyd hear his stupid jokes.

When Boyd is immersed in a good read, he tells everyone who will listen, which, granted, is not very many people. But, Johnny will look at them sideways, pour him another and give him half-attention under the music from the juke and Raylan will smile at him until he shuts up. If Ava is there, she will ask questions.

If they get drunk enough they will dance, but only to the slow songs and the ones with a twang, They like the oldies, the ones from even before their own time.

There is gray in Raylan's hair and Boyd's is retreating far up his forehead.

They are fit as they ever were and they don't feel so much older as they feel secure in their skin. Ralan's not ready to crawl out of his and Boyd's not so eager to dig himself deep.

They know each other without words, but sometimes will still need reminding. Boyd will stew in silence and Raylan will chafe at his bonds, but they will catch each other up sooner than is dangerous with a hard, soft look.

Raylan will ask him, "What do you want to be today, Boyd?" and Boyd will say, "What we are, Raylan," with an old, true smile.

It's almost always the same to them.

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Tim waits maybe forty-five minutes until the phone rings again.

Johnny gets this surprised look on his face as he goes to answer it. He says, “You’re sure?” and then “Yeah, hold on,” as he reaches for a pen and paper. He gets off the phone maybe a minute later and turns to Tim. “They got somethin’ for you,” he says and hands over the paper.

It’s directions to a crossroads, or a field about 500 yards past a crossroads, where Tim is supposed to be in just under twenty minutes. He throws too much money for his drink on the bar and rushes out. As he drives away he wonders if he should have said “bye” to Johnny, who’s become somewhat of a fixture in his life in the past few days.

As far as Tim can tell, the directions he has are leading him up some mountain, further into the hills than he’s ever been before. He knows, unless business takes them down, these two prefer to stay isolated. He always figured, if he met them he’d do it nearer the town. He supresses a shiver and drives on anyway. He calls Art and leaves a message saying, if he doesn’t answer his phone in an hour or two, send someone out for him.

There is a tall, thin man leaning against a trailer pulled by a beat up blue pickup truck where Tim pulls in past the crossroads. There is a car parked in front of Tim’s SUV, trunk facing towards him.

The man is wearing a baseball cap low over his eyes, old and worn, and an open button down flannel shirt over a pristinely white undershirt. His arms are crossed in front of him. He’s got a glock in a holster at his hip. This is Raylan Givens. Tim’s looked over his license to carry.

Raylan looks up, smiles almost wryly, and pounds twice on the side of the trailer, before he pushes off and walks casually forward. He slides his hands into his back pockets as Tim climbs out of his vehicle.

“Mr. Givens,” Tim says and has to squint his eyes as Raylan walks in front of the sun. Tim raises a hand for shade.

“Deputy Gutterson,” Raylan replies. His voice is deeper than Tim expects, rough in a tired kind of way, like it takes a special effort to push the words past his lips.

The door to the trailer opens and another thin man takes a step out. Boyd Crowder’s eyes are just as arresting as his mug shot and he’s not smiling like Raylan is. He wears a similar flannel shirt to Raylan’s, though his is buttoned up straight to the collar and tucked neatly into his jeans.

Tim wonders, in some disconnected part of his brain, if they share clothing.

Boyd crosses his arms and leans against the doorway to their home. His hair is longer than the picture Tim’s seen, sticks up higher into the air, and it’s got no gray in it like Raylan’s. He carries no weapon that Tim can see and he says nothing by way of greeting. His face is astoundingly impassive and Tim finds himself, usually so unshakeable, unnerved by it.

He begins to understand what it is about these two that people react to. It's such a welcome realization, after so much confusion, that he almost laughs and he can't quite stop a grin from spreading across his face.

"Somethin' funny, Deputy?" Givens asks.

"No sir," Tim replies, the sun still in his eyes. It's hard to look at them. "I'm just real pleased to be here."

Boyd shifts, still unsmiling, but something's changed in his expression, loosened and Raylan steps forward, almost in response. He's out of the sun now.

"Heard you been askin' after us," Raylan says. Tim takes down his hand.

"I have," Tim answers readily. It's no secret. He looks between them, though Boyd is still partially obscured by the glare.

He's onto them. There's no "I heard," or "we heard," here. Be vague and short and implacable and people will hear what they want. You start out as a pair of angry kids with too much between you and too much in your way, you destroy things, you threaten to mess people up, and fifteen years later you can coast by with a cold eye and a deep frown and break a few fingers and you're fine. People will listen. It's smart. It's safe.

Tim smiles. "I'm bettin' you know where my bail-jumper is."

"That's an easy bet," Raylan replies and takes a step nearer the car in front of Tim. Boyd tilts his head.

"You gonna tell me?"

Tim can see all the knowledge in Raylan's smile and in Boyd's eyes, now that the sun has fallen behind the trees at their backs.

"You have a plan, case we aren't forthcoming?" Raylan asks, eyes dancing in amusement.

Tim's not one to enjoy being played with, but he can spot a test when he sees one. He's maybe got their number, but he's not willing to bank on keeping a hold of it. He wonders how the last guy pissed them off, maybe he refused to play.

"You *say* you don't know where he is, I'll ask nice to go down to your daddy's," he answers looking at Boyd, "and by that, I mean through the back door of your cousin's bar and search the place." Tim looks back at Raylan, who's not smiling anymore, but he doesn't yet look angry. "You tell me no, I'll go anyway and I'll go with a team of Marshals and a friend I got at the DEA. He can't wait to get his hand's back around Bo Crowder's collar. You think the old man will be able to keep his mouth shut quite so tight if he goes another round?"

Boyd steps forward now and lays a hand on the back of Raylan's elbow. It could mean anything. It probably means nothing. Tim's onto them.

Raylan nods and says, "That's a good plan, Deputy Gutterson."

“Too bad, we found your man for you,” Boyd says as he steps in front of the trunk. He speaks softly, in a higher tone than Raylan, and his lips quirk like he’s trying to resist a smile. He pops the trunk to reveal a young man, bound and gagged, fear in his eyes and sweat on his brow.

It’s the bail-jumper. Sure as shit. Tim’s not surprised at all.

“Now that can’t be good for him,” he says without thinking, smirk slapped across his face.

Raylan laughs. It’s not loud, but it’s there and his eyes crinkle as he replies, “Can’t say I ever heard a lawman express so much concern for his quarry.”

Tim leans back a bit and looks down at the man. “I just don’t want anybody to think I roughed him any on the trip back up.”

“You want us to come in with you, too? *Witness*?” He says it like a dirty word.

Tim’s eyes snap to Raylan’s. “Would you?”

Raylan looks for a moment like he really wants to, until Boyd steps near him and wraps a hand around his wrist, easy and sure. “No,” Raylan replies with a grin as Boyd shakes his head. “Maybe some other time, Deputy.” He’s laughing through it. His other hand curls around Boyd’s shoulder.

It could be a lie, it could be a good bit of acting, but Tim doesn’t really care all that much. His gaze flicks between them fast and he wonders how often they get this, eyes that can’t look away.

He licks his lips and Boyd’s eyes flash something just a little bit dark. “You best be on your way, now,” he says, brows up, voice soft, but firm. Tim bites back a “yes, sir.”

He drags the man from the trunk and, reluctantly, pulls off his gag. It’s hard for someone to engage their right to remain silent with a bandana through their teeth. He regrets it immediately, as the guy starts yelling about what Raylan did to him, a gun in his mouth, and citizen’s arrest bullshit. Tim raises his eyebrows, but Boyd is turning them both away.

“Have fun, Deputy,” Raylan says over his shoulder, hand raised in farewell. “See you around.”

He can tell Art only barely believes him when he comes back to the office with the bail-jumper in tow.

“They just gave him to you?”

“Makes sense,” Tim shrugs. “They don’t want law enforcement sniffing around there more than they already do. You’d rather I try and book one or the other for assault or something then have ‘em both after me when they get out?”

Art rubs a hand across his head. “Shit,” he grumbles. “These guys are good.”

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They are and aren’t and what that is changes. They know it now and keep it mostly hidden.

Raylan likes that the marshal seemed to have them more or less figured out. He says it’s refreshing, but Boyd says it’s dangerous, says they should think about taking steps. Raylan puts his foot down.

They stay off his radar and they don’t get caught.

Some people come in and out.

A man from Miami with a bullet Raylan only nearly dodges. A redhead from the mine with greed in her heart and steel in her spine. She doesn’t get what she came for.

Bo Crowder makes moves they don’t appreciate. Johnny takes over and no one raises any more fuss. Raylan and Boyd dance on his floor and never set foot in his back room.

They are more than they aren’t and what they are is together, and smart, and safe, and whole.

Raylan has dreams of other paths and places, of a gun in his hand while he’s walking on the right side, of sunshine all day and lands flat and dry. Boyd pulls him close those nights, drawing his head down, his lips near, and whispers, “What do you need?”

And Raylan shakes his head, hands tight, skin warm. He replies, “Only what I got, baby.”

End Notes

The title of this fic comes from the Band of Horses song Funeral. I don't usually do titles from song lyrics, but as soon as this fic formed in my head, I couldn't get this song out of it either, so it must be provenance or something. An additional playlist for this fic will follow soon, because it just seems very musically rich, more so than most of my other work.

Long and heartfelt thanks go to scioscribe for both permission to remix her lovely work and for fabulous beta duties. Thanks for additional beta duties and infinite patience as this fic ate my brain in the past few weeks goes to thornfield_girl, as well.

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